

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 27, 2010

The Honorable Barack Obama  
President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama:

Over the past year, you have consistently and repeatedly made clear your good faith desire to enter into meaningful negotiations with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran about their nuclear activities in violation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). We deeply regret that rather than seizing your historic offer, the Iranian government has instead chosen to spurn it.

At the same time, you have also repeatedly made clear that your patience with the Iranian regime is not unlimited. As you said last October, “We’re not interested in talking for the sake of talking. If Iran does not take steps in the near future to live up to its obligations, then the United States will not continue to negotiate indefinitely, and we are prepared to move towards increased pressure.” In May, you indicated that you wanted to see “serious movement” by the Iranians by the end of 2009—a deadline that has since been reiterated on multiple occasions by Secretary of State Clinton and other senior officials of your Administration, and endorsed by our international partners.

Now that this deadline has passed, we believe that it is imperative to put into action your pledge of increased, meaningful pressure against the Iranian regime—what Secretary Clinton called “crippling sanctions.” We believe that it is extremely important for the world to know that the United States means what it says, and that we in fact do what we say we are going to do. As you rightly stated in your Nobel Prize acceptance speech in Oslo, “If we want a lasting peace, then the words of the international community must mean something. Those regimes that break the rules must be held accountable. Sanctions must exact a real price.”

We understand that your Administration is likely to pursue a fifth sanctions resolution at the United Nations Security Council. We strongly support your Administration’s painstaking diplomacy in support of this goal and hope that it succeeds in securing measures that stand a reasonable chance of changing the behavior of Iran’s government for the better. However, based on previous experience, we are acutely aware of the limits of Security Council action, in particular given the likely resistance to meaningful sanctions by the People’s Republic of China. We note with dismay the recent statement of China’s ambassador to the United Nations that,

“This is not the right time or right moment for sanctions, because the diplomatic efforts are still going on.”

As you know, China has rapidly become one of Iran’s largest trading partners and one of the largest investors in Iran’s energy sector, in apparent contravention of the *Iran Sanctions Act*. Indeed, while several European countries have acted responsibly to restrict their commercial dealings with Teheran in response to its illicit nuclear activities, China has opportunistically moved to fill the gap. Shortly after the international community adopted a resolution at the International Atomic Energy Agency condemning Iran for failing to disclose the existence of its Qom enrichment facility, China announced that several of its state-controlled companies would make multi-billion dollar investments in Iran’s domestic refining capacity. We fear that Beijing’s pursuit of its narrow commercial self-interest in Iran is jeopardizing the chances of reaching a diplomatic solution in the nuclear stand-off and greatly increases the risk of developments that could profoundly destabilize the Persian Gulf and global energy markets. China’s behavior toward Iran also calls into question whether it is interested in being a responsible stakeholder in the international system and does significant damage to its relationship with the United States.

Given that China now holds the rotating presidency of the UN Security Council, it seems highly unlikely that a new sanctions resolution can be adopted prior to February, when France assumes the Council presidency. We are troubled by the prospect of this delay, which could mean that it will be well into 2010 before the Security Council is able to put in place new sanctions, which we hope will be far stronger than those provided for in past resolutions.

For this reason, we hope that, as early as this month, your Administration will pursue parallel and complementary measures, outside the Security Council, to increase the pressure on the Iranian government. As you know, your Administration has ample authority under previous Security Council resolutions, as well as the *Iran Sanctions Act*, the *Iran Freedom Support Act*, the *Iran-Syria-North Korea Non-Proliferation Act*, and numerous other existing laws and executive orders—some of which have gone largely unenforced—to act now. We are also committed to quickly passing new comprehensive sanctions legislation in Congress that will provide you with additional authorities to pressure Iran, and urge you to make full use of them.

We are convinced that 2010 will be the pivotal year in determining whether Iran is allowed to acquire a nuclear weapons capability. Ultimately, it will be our choices that determine whether we are able to avert this tremendous threat to global peace and stability. We abhor the possibility that military action may be necessary to solve this problem. But we have no doubt that a nuclear-armed Iran will be catastrophic for our national security and the rule-based international order. In fact, we believe that at stake is nothing less than the entire global nonproliferation regime; this point is all the more important as we head into the 2010 review of the NPT. We must therefore exhaust every possible non-military means at our disposal to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability.

We stand ready to work alongside you to do everything that is necessary to stop Iran’s acquisition of a nuclear weapons capability in the critical months ahead. We urge you to pursue this critical goal in conjunction with a broader effort to increase American support for the human rights and peaceful aspirations of the Iranian people. Both are essential to our national interest.

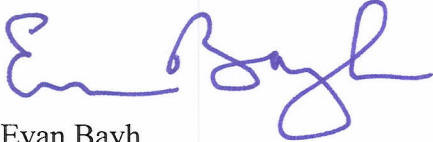
Sincerely,

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Jon Kyl  
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joe Lieberman".

Joseph Lieberman  
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Evan Bayh".

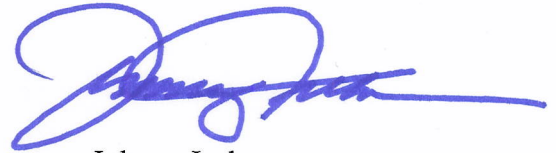
Evan Bayh  
United States Senator

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John McCain  
United States Senator

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Robert Casey  
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Johnny Isakson".

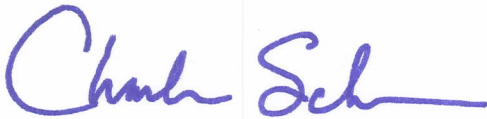
Johnny Isakson  
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ben Cardin".

Benjamin Cardin  
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "David Vitter".

David Vitter  
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Chuck Schumer".

Charles Schumer  
United States Senator